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AGNOSTIC REALISM.

Some Philosophical Criticisms on Certain Aspects of Agnosticism.

W. L. SHELTON.

Agnosticism is not quite as old as philosophy. The natural mind is rather impressed with what it knows than with what it does not know. Explanation seems quite a simple thing to undeveloped thought. Men are not given to doubting their own capacity, and least of all to doubting their own wisdom. But, as soon as philosophical thinking had expanded to any extent, an active intellect would begin to notice the countless contradictions in every system presented, even in such a one as he could make himself, and then the conclusion was at hand: I do not know; nobody knows; nobody can ever know. The ultimate grounds of such a reasoning have at all times been pretty much the same. It was always the disputed and unsolved problems as to the nature of sensations and consciousness. Among the ancients it was "the deceitfulness of the senses"; at the present time it is the impossibility of accounting for consciousness on a scientific basis. And yet, do something with it we must, and what shall we make of it? Pronounce it unexplainable, answers Du Bois-Reymond, and thus we have disposed of it. Posit it as the subjective side of things, say Helmholtz and Mr. Spencer. Take it as consciousness, add Lotze and Paulsen, and presume that everything has more or less of consciousness. Call it spirit, responds the idealist, for all is spirit. These suggestions all have an illusive air about them. We feel attracted to each one of them until we discover troublesome contradictions on every side.

The language of Du Bois-Reymond sounds really naïve. That which of all things is given to our most immediate cognition, that which in fact constitutes our only immediate knowledge, that which is the means through which we gather any and all knowledge whatever, that consciousness we shall pronounce altogether unexplainable. Truly, in making such an assertion, the scientist must have had an extraordinary motive. Call nature unexplainable, assert the basis of the world as unknown and unknowable, lay the origin of things among the problems which can never be

solved, posit mystery when and wherever one will, only do not draw the veil of mystery over that which is the veil itself, do not pronounce that as unknowable which of all things is alone given to us as immediately known. The fact is, the scientist does not perceive where he can place it in his general theory of things. He not only cannot place it, but for consistency's sake he would rather have it out of the way. It is a troublesome factor in his calculations. He has established a law which he wishes to believe universal—the everlasting persistency of forcing nature. An old energy may not altogether vanish, a new energy not appear in existence. “Mechanical causes exhaust themselves in mechanical effects,” says Du Bois-Reymond. Had he senses delicate and far-reaching enough, he could follow the sensations along the nerves up to the brain, he could watch the whole mechanical process in all its details; had he a faculty of calculating sufficiently broad, he could prophecy in advance every movement which the physical organism would make; that organism would be completely known and explainable by him in all its manifestations, and yet, by his own acknowledgment, he would meet no trace of consciousness anywhere. The physical structure in all its acts becomes through itself intelligible, and consciousness is a superfluous factor. It cannot be the brain, because we can know the brain in all its movements; it cannot act upon the brain, because then it would introduce a new force, and all the actions can be accounted for through the laws of the brain and its physical environment. Nature and consciousness can thus have no mutual influence and dependency, else an old force would be lost track of, or a wholly new force appear; and we can account for every force that goes into and comes out of the physical organism, without taking any account of consciousness whatever.

And thus consciousness cannot manifest itself at all, and the science of psychology is annihilated. Every psychical manifestation can be explained and can be foreseen as taking place through mechanical causes. Moral science is thus a fallacious notion, and all history an illusion. The eleven long years, for example, which the historian Buckle devoted to writing his immortal work, were thrown away on mistaken analogies. The great laws of human development which he gathered out of his analysis had no actual realization outside of his own fertile imagination. Sociology is but

physiology in union with physics and chemistry. Had he wished to establish actual laws, he should have gone to the study of anatomy. He assembled his facts out of writings. But those writings were mechanical facts and took place *wholly* through mechanical laws, because those laws can account for them, and the assumption of any new psychical cause would be contrary to the conservation of energy.

We believe we have been drawing conclusions quite logically from the statements of Du Bois-Reymond, and yet without doubt he makes his every motion wholly contrary to any such conclusions. If he is in conversation with another, he no doubt assumes that he is in communication with another consciousness. And yet by his theory the assumption is superfluous. According to his mechanical view of things, had he senses delicate enough, and a sufficiently extensive knowledge of physical laws, he could penetrate the physiological structure of that individual, and anticipate every expression which the mouth would utter, and yet nowhere come in contact with a consciousness; and nevertheless he is convinced that he is in communication with such a one; but he may have the conviction only through the physical manifestation, which then must have been acted upon by consciousness. One belief evidently does not agree with the other. We see, then, the mistake in his position. We may assume an unknown and an unused factor as unexplainable, likewise a factor that does not quite agree with our theory but has no definite connection to it. But we may not assume a factor as unexplainable which we look upon as existing, and which we use in all our reasoning, just because that factor appears to be in contradiction to our theory. Either the theory must account for the factor and put itself in harmony with it, or else it must withdraw from the field. The principle of the conservation of energy must explain consciousness *as manifesting itself*, or else acknowledge itself to be no absolute law. We have every evidence that consciousness can and does act upon the sensible world. We may apply the very same criteria which are used in all inductive science, and the same criteria which they make use of to prove the law of energy. We notice that certain acts or series of acts of the physical organism take place only when preceded by certain states of consciousness, and we notice that these acts vary as the states of consciousness vary. We can apply these

laws much more closely than the physiologist, whose application is really one of analogy or deduction from general mechanical phenomena. We do not pretend that consciousness constitutes any new substance or that it may introduce any new force. We only insist that in giving an explanation as to the nature of things every factor presented must be taken into account, and must be made to agree with any general theory—until that is done, the theory can only be provisional. We may not assume that as unknowable which we *use* as real and knowable. Such an agnostic realism contains a logical contradiction. We shall notice this mistake even more definitely in examining some phases of the English psychology.

The revival of agnosticism may be said to be due chiefly to the influence of Locke. Although his philosophy is obscured by the theological restraint which he manifests in all his writings, yet it is quite plain that he believed the actual substance of things to be unapproachable and unknowable. Professor Paulsen, of Berlin, was justified in asserting that he was a genuine forerunner of the metaphysics of Kant. He ventured to pronounce the sensations to be subjective in their nature, and wholly unlike anything without the consciousness. Color, sound, and taste had no objective reality. Then, however, he made a singular distinction that tends to vitiate his whole theory. These sensations he looked upon as secondary qualities, whereas certain other qualities, such as the relations of space, figure, motion, impenetrability, and the like, he considered primary and real, given to the mind as actual elements of the objective world. We would lay less stress upon the destruction thus presented, did we not feel that it likewise inheres in most of the modern English psychology, though in a disguised form and with manifold protestations against it. The chief reason that could be given in its behalf would be that these so-called primary qualities seem to be always present, and to be less variable in character. But the fact which such a distinction does not notice is that we use the secondary ones to get a knowledge of those which he calls primary. These sensations of color, sound, and taste make up our most immediate perceptions, and it is *through* these sensations that we may gather or infer any other qualities and relations. Those which he calls primary have only an existence for us as cohering with the secondary; they may, in fact, be

looked upon as expressing qualities and relations of the ones he has named as secondary. And if the sensations be subjective and ideal, in no way representing anything outside of the consciousness, may we think their qualities and relations as objective and actual? No wonder that, in the face of such a contradiction, Berkeley should have fallen back upon pure idealism. If the sensations be wholly subjective in character, we may either assume that they represent something like them outside of us, or else that the objective world is wholly unknown. We see, then, the difference of method and result displayed by the German metaphysicians as contrasted with the English psychologists. Kant postulates the *forms* of our knowledge, such as space, time, and the categories, as wholly subjective. The sensations in that case, in passing through them, must become so modified as to give us no positive knowledge of the world from whence they came. Locke, on the other hand, postulates the sensations as wholly subjective; but then, strangely enough, he presumes their forms and relations to be objective, pure and real representatives of the qualities of actual things. And the psychologist of to-day, while making the same postulates, nevertheless asserts in like manner the existence of some ontological order that shall correspond to the order of the subjective phenomena. The language seems vague, and the reasons in behalf of such a conviction ambiguous. We recognize such a realism as contrary to the agnostic basis which they have already laid down.

In examining the theory of agnosticism, let us seek to make plain on just what points all philosophers appear to coincide. We will presume, for example, that we are standing on an eminence under the open sky—a friend is also present—we are looking at the scene around us; it is made up of what we call the green valleys, the blue sky, the white and fleecy clouds, a throng of colors, lights, and shadows. We seem to hear the voices of men floating up to us from below. We seem to detect the scent of plants and flowers wafted to us by the breeze. We appear to perceive the form of the friend at our side and to recognize the sound of his voice, and now as philosophers we ask, what does this scene really mean to us, what of it all do we believe to have an objective existence beyond our consciousness? We believe at any rate that we are in communication with another consciousness whom we call our friend. We believe that we have this throng of sen-

sations that goes to make up this extensive scene, and we believe that the second consciousness has a like set of sensations. And now we ask, may we presume that these sensations represent an objective reality which resembles them? The empiricist hesitates. "*Das Auge mit dem wir zu sehen glauben ist selbst nur ein Product unsrer Vorstellung,*" answers Lange. May we not then at least suppose that the sensations have an objective cause outside of all consciousness? The idealist hesitates. "*Für das Individuum sind die andere Intelligenzen die ewige Trägers des Universums,*" responds Schelling. We ask the agnostic why the sensations, though subjective, may not have a resemblance to an objective reality. He will possibly reply, Because that to which we have reduced the sensations manifests no likeness to the sensations themselves. Just what do they mean by reducing them to their causes? Apparently it implies a reduction of them to one class of causes; but in reality it is a reduction of them all to one class of sensations. In this respect they have really made a discovery. They believe that they can show that many of the sensations, if not all of them, are either preceded or accompanied by vibrations of some kind, and where are the vibrations? External to us in the objective world, of course. And how do we detect the evidence of these vibrations? Chiefly through experiments in using the sense of seeing. But he has pronounced the sensations all subjective. "A unit of motion has nothing in common with a unit of feeling," says Spencer. We meet thus in the scientific agnosticism the plainest contradiction, and yet many of the scientists of the present day, who believe the sensations to be wholly unlike the objective nature which causes them, nevertheless use these same sensations to prove that what does actually precede them is vibrations. As though vibrations themselves were anything but expressions in the language of the very sensations which have been assumed as having no reality! We thus, as it were, make use of an unknowable to explain another unknowable. We introduce a realism that we have already denied. What we may discover is this, that, while or before we are having the sensations of sound, we could also have certain sight sensations of vibration, did we only have eyes delicate enough to perceive them. But, by the theory of the scientist, the vibrations themselves are equally subjective with the sounds. The utmost we can assert is that the

unknown objective cause would excite the appearance of vibrations along with the appearance of the tones. But that does not give us any evidence that the ultimate unknown cause can actually be called vibrations at all.

Mr. Spencer would be inclined to evade such a contradiction in another way. He does not apply to consciousness quite so extreme an unknowableness as Du Bois-Reymond. With him it is simply the subjective side of things. As subjective it is knowable, but he confesses his agnosticism in attempting to reduce it to an absolute unity with that which he assumes as objective. It is true that all the sensations and their relations, all these physical, chemical, and biological laws, gravitation, molecular motion, and vital action, all give to us only subjective phenomena, and do not represent any actual existing realities of the external world; though they do point to some persistent force which causes in us these subjective states with all their attendant relations. These states can only be used as "symbols" of that unknown. In his own language, "That which is objectively a wave of molecular motion propagated through a nerve-center is subjectively a unit of feeling." "But a unit of motion has nothing in common with a unit of feeling." The wave of molecular motion is, then, objective, according to his view. His application is, of course, to another consciousness than his own. And how do we get a knowledge of this objective molecular wave which is the objective side of that other consciousness? Through his own sensations, of course. But his own sensations, by his theory, are subjective and have nothing in common with the objective existence. Then the molecular wave is, after all, also subjective. Logically then, that which is the subjective side of his own consciousness, is the objective side of another consciousness, and *vice versa*. But the really objective side of things is unknowable. Hence, if he will be logical, he must restate his assertion. That unknowable something which causes in us the picture of a wave of molecular motion is the objective side of another consciousness whose subjective side is a unit of feeling. Possibly Mr. Spencer would not accept that interpretation, but it seems to be the only consistent language he could use. His theory, then, grows less lucid and more complicated. We were already removed through one barrier from the explanation of external nature. We now seem by two barriers removed from an explanation of con-

sciousness. We had already a symbolism ; now we have a symbolism of a symbolism. Mr. Spencer does not adhere to his own agnosticism in his evolution of consciousness. He makes use of an agnostic realism instead of symbolism. He appears to assume that he is in direct communication with the objective side of another consciousness. Any one who reads his "Special Synthesis" must observe that it is, in many respects, the purest Spinozism. Consciousness and the physical world are posited as the subjective and the objective sides of the same thing, whatever takes place in consciousness being but a repetition in the subjective mode of that which takes place without us in the material world. He proceeds thus to evolve consciousness wholly as an objective factor. All those motions and manifestations to which he attributes a subjective side he can explain objectively. It is but an automatic action constantly growing in complication. With the increased complexity, consciousness appears, but to itself only, not as a controlling and influential factor. The automaton continues an automaton. We can explain the whole structure as an involved and intricate reflex action. We can develop the psychical states from the side of the molecular activities ; the subjective element under given conditions simply appears and accompanies the movement as a consciousness. We ask, then, why assume a subjective side, when the supposition is unnecessary in accounting for the objective manifestations ? The objective side can account for itself. But he believes that a consciousness does reveal itself, and if so, it must reveal itself through these manifestations, and in that case they do not account for themselves.

We do not see, then, that Mr. Spencer has advanced one step in his evolution by postulating consciousness and molecular action as being but the two sides of the same thing. We do not wish to go into a metaphysical discussion as to what things may be called the "same," but we do not think that the closest mutual association and dependence necessarily lead to that conclusion. He has recognized by his own test that they do not resemble one another, and have nothing in common with one another. It is true, they may be but two sets of manifestations proceeding from the same unseen power. We may say on the same ground that the whole universe is but a single power disclosing itself in various ways. It is a pleasing thought, but a superfluous hypothesis. That is but a

constant striving to explain what has already been agreed upon as unknowable. The manifestations are the things to us, and what we have to do is to explain the relations in which they stand to one another. And we only insist that the evolutionist shall adhere to his symbolism, that he shall stand by his avowed agnosticism. He has recognized that consciousness is a different manifestation of the unknowable from the physical activities. He cannot make it one, then, with such activities, and cannot explain it through them. In so far as it manifests itself it must be explained through itself. It may be that it stands in so close connection with the physical organism that it appears in existence with it, and vanishes with it again out of existence. While it does live, however, it has its own life and its own laws, and is just as real as the matter with which it is associated. It can not be called the subjective side of matter, but only the subjective side of that unknowable whose objective side is called matter. That may also be the meaning of Mr. Spencer, but it is not the meaning which he employs in his evolution.

In opposition to such a strained and modified dualism, the theory of the idealist may seem more satisfactory and to a greater degree consistent with itself. We shall probably, however, meet with a like double way of reasoning, such as appears to characterize all systems of philosophical speculation. At first the monistic conception of the idealist strikes us as very plausible. The theory seems logical in the extreme. Holbach himself, as the apostle of materialism, was constrained to confess that he found the exposition of Berkeley the most difficult of all the opposing systems which he had to refute. And it was not strange, because they appeared to set out from the same general basis. That knowledge was limited to ideas, was the opinion of Berkeley. That knowledge was made up of sensations, was the view of Holbach. Knowledge of a thing is being conscious of a thing, the idealist would say. We cannot know anything of which we are not conscious; states of consciousness cannot exist apart from the consciousness itself; hence the world of our knowledge consists exclusively of conscious states. Such a theory does not deny the reality of the actual world, it only denies the reality of our inferences as to the unknowable. It has for its motto, just as truly as materialism, the saying of Fuerbach, "*Begnüge dich mit der*

gegebenen Welt," and it does seem as though one was met with a throng of confusing and contradictory notions, when one attempts to analyze the prevalent conception of matter as something actually objective to all that he is himself. Instead of being one special thing, it is discovered to be only a bundle of associations made by one's own mind. Matter implies chiefly space and space-relations, and they imply simply elements of sight-sensations. Whatever we can associate with this class of sensations we call matter. It is a striking fact that almost all phenomena admit of such an association in time. Whatever we cannot in some way connect with what we see, we incline to attribute to a spiritual agency. If, on the contrary, all sensations could be connected with the relations of sound rather than with the relations of vision, would we not have a materialism of sound-relations, instead of a materialism of space-relations? All such theorists fail to remember that vision as well as hearing is subjective, and in that case that the space-relations and the relations of sound are subjective also. Mr. Spencer seeks to escape the proposition of idealism with his criterion of inconceivability. But it may be doubted whether the criterion really applies. Does the natural mind so explicitly believe that his sensations are external to his own consciousness? We look at a tree, and believe, it is true, that there is a greater spacial disagreement between our hand and the tree than between our hand and our foot. That is, we believe that it would require a longer time and a greater number of special acts to associate a sense of touch with the tree than with the foot. But the sensations may still be subjective. We pronounce dreams to be subjective, and yet while dreaming we have the same vivid beliefs of so-called externality as when awake. What we would call the outness of the sensations has therefore a reference to their relations to one another, and not to their relations to consciousness as a whole.

He must feel, then, that by the theory of agnosticism the idealists have a strong position. But there is one fact which they cannot consistently account for. They fully believe in the plurality of consciousnesses, and yet the logical idealist can never get one step outside of himself. He denies the inference of a material substratum to his sensations, and nevertheless he believes in spiritual substrata without himself, from whence come many of his

ideas. But we may inquire why, if his ideas of the natural world have their origin in his own consciousness, may not the ideas which he attributes to another consciousness also really have their foundations within himself? In attempting to respond, he breaks the logical chain of his reasoning. He falls back upon a realism which he has rejected, and attributes a knowable objectivity to that which he has said to be unknowable. Fichte was obliged to appeal to the evidence of the moral law within him. But that was only an appeal to the strength of his natural belief. It continues to be only a belief and not a knowledge. And he would be loath to make use of the same strength of conviction as evidence in any other matter. It would be a dangerous loophole which the realist might employ as well. We see thus the agnosticism of the idealist likewise betraying itself into a contradiction.

Many have felt themselves attracted to a theory which has been gaining ground in philosophical circles, and which had its strongest advocate in Lotze. It appears to be half pantheism and half poetry, the conception of a conscious matter and a conscious universe. It has grown out of the same difficulty of explaining the origin of the sensitive world, and we shall probably discover in the theory the same evasion of agnosticism through an assumed realism that we have already met on every hand. They see that a certain set of so-called material elements and forces come together and make a given set of manifestations. They conclude that these manifestations reveal the existence of a consciousness which has, however, no resemblance whatever to the material activities from whence it sprung. Whence came it, then? Could it have arisen out of nothing? Unthinkable. What, then, shall we say as to its appearance? They seem to discover but one answer. They deny the appropriateness of the question. Why should we presume that it had any origin at all? Why may it not be as eternal as matter itself? Why may it not be an inherent quality of matter? The problem in that case was no problem at all. And thus, in the language of Paulsen, "*Es wird der Natur die Seele zurückgegeben*," and Lotze adds, "*Kein Theil des Seienden ist mehr unbelebt und unbeseelt*." We have in this way a whole universe made up of points of force, each possessing sensation, consciousness, and will. The thought is so beautiful that one hesitates to inquire after its foundations. Lotze, too, has his

agnosticism. With him the mystery of all mysteries is the nature of force. We can never determine how an effect is possible, and through what it can take place. We can only decide under what conditions a given effect may appear. And yet we see him assuming a knowledge of that force which he has declared to be so unknowable. A body to execute an effect must be a self-existence possessing a consciousness and will, according to his theory. Every cause must be a conscious cause. And so we have an objective world whose every movement is the manifestation of some sensitive existence. "*Jener Staub ist nur Staub für den welcher ihn belästigt,*" he adds. But we must ask why he insists that force can only be exercised by a conscious and willing energy? We perceive that he is already striving to enter into that mysterious temple whose portal, by his own statement, must remain forever closed. For acts that resemble our own we may be justified in assuming the presence of another existent self, but for the acts of the universe at large we will postulate no agency that we cannot approach. We have nothing with which to put such acts in analogy. They must continue to be to us what they always have been—simply *acts*.

Another ground for the same theory attempts to have an empirical basis. It would seem to rest on the law of the conservation of energy. It asserts that sensation is wholly unlike the causes from whence it came; it could not have sprung out of nothing, it cannot be a new force, it must, therefore, have had an original inherence in matter as it was; and why, we ask, must a cause resemble an effect? Why, on the appearance of consciousness, must we think that it can not be a new product wholly unlike the forces out of which it arose? Because the composition of several chemical atoms presents a new set of qualities wholly unlike those of the atoms themselves, must we suppose that these new qualities all lay unmanifested in the original atoms? We have no evidence to that effect. And may not a new product come into existence and go out of existence? Whence came that reflection that was thrown on the water, and whither did it go? It appeared and it vanished. That individual reflection existed and ceased to exist. It was just as actual as the material causes that produced it. And may not a combination of physical causes unite to produce a consciousness, and will not that consciousness have an actual existence distinct

from its physical basis, although it be as evanescent as the composition of causes out of which it sprang? We do not assume that the reflection on the water or the shadow on the ground had any original inherence in their causes. Why, then, insist upon such an assumption with regard to sensation? One has just as much reality as the other. We must recognize the fact that change is just as actual as persistence, and the newness of a product just as real as the conservation of the forces from whence it came. A law of absolute and universal persistency in nature would contain the plainest contradiction to the facts from whence it was drawn, and cannot, therefore, be maintained without philosophical suicide.

We have not been going into this discussion with any intention of refuting agnosticism; we wish to see all its adherents and advocates remaining faithful to the theory with which they have set out. But the natural inclination is very strong to attempt to step over the limitations which they have already laid down for themselves. The impulse to unification and simplification is leading scientists to inherent contradictions, which they can not evade by calling the problems unexplainable. Every factor which has been given must be explainable; that is, every such factor can have its relations to its neighboring factors discovered and expressed, and such an expression is explanation. Of course, all such expression must be in the language of consciousness. Consciousness is to us the reality of all realities, and we can never get beyond what that reality will at any time give to us. We acknowledge in this respect our limitations, and confess our agnosticism. But within those limitations and in expressions of that language why should not consciousness be just as explainable as any other existing manifestation? If it cannot be brought under the mechanical basis of things, then a new basis must be arranged and acknowledged, under which it can be classed and expressed. To set it down as unknowable and an illusion appears both unscientific and unphilosophical. We do not see that it is necessary to presume an original primitive spiritual stuff out of which it could be created. Any such absolute dualism seems superfluous. But to confess to a manifest dualism, and then in a philosophical system to make use only of a monism, appears not only unnecessary but also fallacious. We must either confess to materialism, accept an absolute dual-

ism, or else acknowledge to the possibility of a new creation. We do not mean the creation from a divine agency, but we mean the coming into existence of a new being, a new product, which was not contained in its causes and which has no resemblance to its causes. The supposition is one which scientists do not like to entertain. It appears too "unscientific." It does not agree with their methods. But they must at any rate put the fact of consciousness in unison with their general theories. But that is something which they appear neither inclined nor able to do, and in that case they cannot themselves be called true scientists.

CRITIQUE OF KANTIAN PHILOSOPHY.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF PROFESSOR DR. KUNO FISCHER, BY W. S. HOUGH.

CHAPTER III.

THE KANTIAN PHILOSOPHY AS DOCTRINE OF DEVELOPMENT.

I. The Kantian Ground-Problems.

The fact that we conceive a common world of sense was the first problem; its solution constituted the theme of the Kantian doctrine of knowledge. If this world of sense were not completely phenomenal—*i. e.*, conceivable and conceived—that fact would necessarily have been recognized as inexplicable. Objects of sense are appearances or phenomena. In order to explain the latter, three questions have to be answered, which virtually involve Kant's fundamental problems. Firstly, there must be a *subject*, to which anything objective could in general appear, and without which no sort of phenomenon would be possible. The question is: *Who* (what) is the knowing subject? Secondly, there must be an *essence*, which constitutes the ground of all phenomena, and of the knowing subject itself, provided the latter does not create wholly out of itself the things it conceives. In this case the knowing subject would at the same time be the ground of being of all phenomena. But since this is not the case, it must be asked: